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*Super Mini:*

*Jace Kessler, Seth Hammaker, Carson Mumford  
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*Photos: Jeff Kardas*



**SBK**

## **Sun setting on WorldSBK...**

The championships are falling quickly from the FIM cabinet and Jonathan Rea is standing on the threshold of another WorldSBK triumph. Just three points from the last two races of the season in the Losail desert will guarantee that Team65 uncork the champagne once more

**Photo by GeeBee images**











**AMA-MX**

## **New leaf...**

Eli Tomac might have won the sixth Monster Energy Cup but it was Ken Roczen's Honda debut with the shining No.1 (as 2015 victor) that really caught the attention at the Sam Boyd Stadium. Only a spectacular crash in the second of three races derailed a very decent chance of the Monster Million being pocketed for the just the second time

Photo by HRC/Cudby











**MOTOGP**

## **Enough said...**

He's on the cover but it would be remiss not to bask in some of the glory surrounding Marc Marquez for what should have been a term of struggle and adversity. 2016 was a season where the Catalan matured but still showed some of his ferociousness to continue to thrill and amaze

Photo by Automotophoto











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**MOTOGP**

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**TWIN RING MOTEGI · OCTOBER 16th · Rnd 15 of 18**

MotoGP winner: Marc Márquez, Honda

Moto2 winner: Thomas Luthi, Kalex

Moto3 winner: Enea Bastianini, Honda



# 93

CONTINUING THE THEME OF THE UNEXPECTED IN 2016 MOTOGP MARC MARQUEZ RULED THE ROOST AFTER A WORRYING PRE-SEASON, AN UNEXPECTED DOUBLE CRASH BY BOTH VALENTINO ROSSI AND JORGE LORENZO AND IN A CAMPAIGN THAT HAS SEEN EIGHT DIFFERENT WINNERS THE CHAMPIONSHIP WAS WRAPPED WITH THREE ROUNDS TO GO. MARQUEZ MAY HAVE CELEBRATED AT MOTEGI BEFORE – THE LAND OF HONDA – BUT HIS FIFTH WIN OF THE SEASON BANISHED A WINLESS HOODOO FOR THE 23 YEAR OLD AT THE TWIN RING. MOTO2 NARROWED IN JOHANN ZARCO'S FAVOUR WHILE ENEA BASTIANINI RULED MOTO3 FOR THE FIRST TIME THIS TERM

Photos by Andrew Wheeler @automotophoto  
Blogs by Neil Morrison/David Emmett



















# MAN WITH A MISSION...

By Neil Morrison

**I**t seems an awful long time since the final pre-season test in Qatar, during which Jorge Lorenzo assuredly stated he and Yamaha were in better shape than the season before, and Marc Marquez wore a strained and haggard expression; the ongoing toils of wrestling a wayward Honda RC213V evident to anyone in his presence.

Struggling to come to terms with new electronics software, a bike with a vastly different engine design, and adapting to ever-changing Michelin tyre characteristics were enough to occupy Marquez's thoughts between and during testing in those winter months. Furthermore, there was a sense of frustration at Honda repeating the ills that had plagued performance the year before.

At that moment the notion that Marquez could even challenge for the world title seemed far-fetched, let alone win it with three races to spare. "If on Sunday last year you didn't feel well or had the wrong setup, you could finish fourth or fifth," he said at the close of testing. "This year will be different. You have to be ready or you will finish eighth, ninth or tenth."

Those comments and the subsequent panning out of events make his securing of the crown at Motegi all the more remarkable. His feats as a class rookie in 2013 were astonishing. As was his cruise to the trophy a year later, including that devastating ten-in-a-row run that started the season. But in 2016 we saw a rider evolving and maturing, using his mind as much as that renowned ability, making this, possibly, his most impressive championship to date.

Never was that mix more evident than the flag-to-flag race in Germany, when, a cool headed decision to pit for slicks on a track containing showed clear-sighted thinking and the required testicular heft. Then there were the showings at Montmeló and Assen, Austria and Misano. Although wins weren't forthcoming, the manner in which he accepted defeat for the greater, long-term good was striking. Not that this forward thinking approach has led to Marquez being any less spectacular to watch.

Quite the opposite. Just look at those miraculous saves in free practice at Assen and Brno. Or his frightening falls in practice at Austria, Aragon and Silverstone. These events underlined a new way of thinking: go all out on Friday and Saturday so you're all-to-aware of the limits come Sunday.

"This year I've also had many [saves] during practices," he says. "I've been looking for the limit many times in those sessions in order to be safer during race."

Sure, title contenders Valentino Rossi and Lorenzo made a series of uncharacteristic mistakes along the way. But, in Rossi's case, three of those stemmed from Marquez's unshakeable self-belief, to not use HRC's early woes – and Movistar Yamaha's initial position of serious strength – as reason to allow frustration to overflow. Instead, circumstance further fuelled that fire within.

"I remember during the winter test, many people in the paddock were saying that winning the title this season was almost impossible for us. I felt very motivated at that moment," he said. "My belief is that nothing is impossible and you must always keep working."





It was that belief that carried him to a points haul of 170 by the summer break - compare that to the other Honda mounted men, who had chalked up 96, 42, 40 and 18 at that time - and ultimately gave him enough breathing space in the season's second half.

***“You have to wonder what he will do if Honda’s ‘17 engine is more user-friendly without sacrificing power...”***

Small and diminutive in stature he may be, but Marquez also possesses a gift at getting the best out of those around him. You get the impression crew chief Santi Hernandez and the band of engineers around would carry out any command at his behest. His words at Motegi on early season meetings with Honda conveyed a natural leader at work, both headstrong and convinced of his own conviction.

“I had several meetings with Honda during which I promised them that I’d be more conservative and I focused on getting as many points as possible in the first races, but they had to help me in the second half of the season. I asked them to show everyone how Honda is able to react to challenges, because we were so far from our top level.

“I said to all my engineers, ‘I believe in you, so I will change my mentality in the first races but in the second part of the season I need your help’. And really, little by little, we’ve been cutting our gap to the others.” Marquez said.

His actions in the wake of Luis Salom’s untimely death in Montmeló cannot be understated either. A day on from the incident, as Lorenzo and Rossi lost themselves in petty claims over the Safety Commission’s actions, Marquez sat calmly, commanding Saturday’s press conference while explaining the process with patience, composure and clarity - perhaps a snapshot of the man that operates when the garage door is firmly shut and the engineers are huddled around.

Honda’s ‘16 engine was by no means perfect. I’ll never forget speaking to a well-placed engineer that regularly works on a RC213V when the series returned to Europe. “Honda can introduce many new parts to combat this. But at the end of the day the engine will still be this engine.” His point? Nothing HRC can throw at the bike will paper over this large crack.

It’s not just a credit to Marquez then, riding above the bike’s capabilities, but to Honda for making considerable strides with electronics and aerodynamics from August.

It leaves you pondering just what he will do if rumour is to be believed and Honda’s ‘17 engine is more user-friendly without sacrificing power. His record of five world championships in seven seasons means he could retire tomorrow and be remembered as one of the all-time greats. Looking ahead and you would be hard pressed to name a premier class record that is beyond this young Catalan’s reach.



















## 93 OR 46?

By David Emmett

So that was title number five. Or number three, depending on how you are counting (it is a sensitive subject, most commonly in the context of nine-time world champion Valentino Rossi). Marc Márquez headed to the flyaways expecting to return as champion, but he didn't expect to clinch it at Motegi. The way he ended up with the title was illustrative of the 2016 season. Márquez explored the limits in practice, falling off as he always does, then rode just inside the limit all the way to the finish line. He took the lead early, and both Movistar Yamaha riders crashed out, Valentino Rossi losing the front trying on lap 7 to chase down Márquez, Jorge Lorenzo washing out the front on lap 20 trying to defend his second place from a rapidly approaching Andrea Dovizioso and Maverick Viñales.

Marc Márquez won the race and the championship thanks to a mature approach, picking the battles he could win, and limiting his losses in the battles he couldn't. Valentino Rossi lost by wanting it too much, pushing too hard at Austin, Assen and Motegi, and crashing out. Jorge Lorenzo lost by failing to get his head around the Michelin tyres until it was too late, especially in the wet. Marc Márquez – thanks, above all, to the painful lessons of 2015, when he threw his shot at the title away by crashing while trying to claim unwinnable Grands Prix – proved to be a complete racer. He never lost sight of the real objective: winning a championship. Taking races is sweet, but winning titles is sweeter.

Marc Márquez is not yet 24 years old, and he already has three MotoGP titles under his belt. Now in his fourth season in the premier class, he has won 29 races, an average of just over seven a season. His win rate in the 69 GPs he has started so

far is 42%. He has finished on the podium in 50 of those 69 races, a podium rate of 72%. His average points score is 17.5 per race, 1.5 points more than if he finished third in every single race he has started. He has become champion in three of his first four seasons. He is the youngest rider to earn three premier class titles, and the youngest to win five Grand Prix titles. It is truly an astounding record.

Such precociousness begs comparisons with another young rider who came out and blew the field away when he first moved up to the premier class. In Valentino Rossi's first four seasons, he rode 64 races (the season was 16 races long between 2000 and 2003), of which he won 33, an average of a smidgeon over eight races a year. The Italian was on the podium for 54 of those 64 races, or 84% of the time. And Rossi's points average was 19.5 points per race, the equivalent of finishing second in almost every race he competed in.

Such comparisons are precarious, of course. Rossi and Márquez started their careers in two very different eras. Rossi's first two seasons were aboard a 500cc two-stroke, and though the 500s had been greatly tamed by the time he climbed aboard them, they were still vicious beasts capable of highsidings athletes into the asteroid belt. He crashed out of the first two races before getting the hang of the NSR500, climbed the podium for the first time in the fourth race at Jerez, then winning his first 500cc Grand Prix at Donington, the ninth race of the season. He then went on to be just about unbeatable, especially once the series switched to four strokes in 2002.





Marc Márquez came into MotoGP in the middle of the four stroke era, and mounted - what was at that time - the best bike on the grid, bequeathed to him by the retiring Casey Stoner. He finished on the podium in the first race, ending up third behind the two factory Yamahas of Jorge Lorenzo and Valentino Rossi, after a spectacular battle with Rossi. He triumphed next time out, taking his first MotoGP victory in just his second race. He went on to win six races that season, scooping the MotoGP title in his first year, then dominated his second season, before struggling in the third.

***“Is Marquez better than Rossi? I am not sure that is a question with an easy answer...”***

Comparisons may be difficult between two very different eras, but there is one factor that speaks in favour of the Spaniard. When Valentino Rossi came into the premier class he faced Max Biaggi, Alex Crivillé, Alex Barros, Kenny Roberts Jr, Carlos Checa and Loris Capirossi. Only Roberts and Crivillé had won titles, and only Biaggi is anywhere near the top of the all-time winners list, in twelfth position with 42 Grand Prix wins. When Márquez entered MotoGP, he faced Valentino Rossi, Jorge Lorenzo and Dani Pedrosa. At the time, Rossi had seven world titles, led the premier class winners list with 79 victories, and sat at 105 victories in all three classes. Lorenzo had two MotoGP titles and 44 Grand Prix wins, and Pedrosa had 45 Grand

Prix victories. In the all time winners list, Rossi was second, Pedrosa seventh, Lorenzo tenth. There is no question that when Marc Márquez graced MotoGP, he faced the toughest field of all time. Rossi, Pedrosa, Lorenzo and Márquez are all destined to go down in history as all-time greats. To enter MotoGP in 2013 and win is a sign of astonishing talent.

Is Marc Márquez better than Valentino Rossi? I am not sure that is a question with an easy answer. Rossi's achievements are so unique, and extend so far beyond the track and beyond the sport of motorcycle racing that they will not be rivalled for a generation or more. But in terms of raw talent, it is hard not to give Márquez the edge. I always believed that Casey Stoner was the most talented rider I ever saw race a motorcycle, but then along came Marc Márquez. What's more, Márquez combines the mental strength of Valentino Rossi with a talent superior to Stoner's.

Will Márquez go on to break Rossi's records? If he keeps racing for long enough, there is a very good chance he will. But the one distinguishing characteristic of Valentino Rossi is his unflagging ambition and his will to race. That Rossi is as good as he is at the age of 37 is truly remarkable, the Italian having had to change his style so many times during his career to face down young challengers. He is signed to race for two more seasons, and looks set to continue beyond that. Whether Márquez has Rossi's staying power is still to be seen. So if you ask me the question of whether Marc Márquez is better than Valentino Rossi, my reply would have to be, I will tell you in 20 years' time.



**You've won three World MotoGP titles in four years. What would you answer to those who think it has been easy?**

"Said like that, it's true that one could think it was easy, but it hasn't been the case at all and every year has been very different. This is a sport where not everything depends on oneself. There are a lot of factors at play, from the bike, to the factory, to the team, and everyone must be at 100 per cent, which isn't easy. I learned a lot last year because I made many mistakes and it cost me the title, but I'm sure that next year will be different again. The important thing is to constantly stay in the top three."

**This year we saw many spectacular "saves". How many were there that we didn't see?**

"It's true that you can't always see what happens on track. Even in Sunday's race I had one save at turn three that wasn't shown on TV, where I thought I was down but actually saved it. What's certain is that on TV you only see the most spectacular ones—those where one can't believe how you saved them—but there are many others that one can't appreciate but that could've ended in falls. It makes your

heart skip, but this year I've also had many during practices, because I've been looking for the limit many times in those sessions in order to be safer during race."

**Six zeroes last year, this year none: How did you change yourself in order to regain the throne?**

"I tried to learn from last year and to use that experience, but it's all relative because it also depends on how one's season begins. If you start the year well, it's much easier to manage. When you make a mistake at the beginning, your Championship becomes an uphill climb, and that forces you to risk more. Anyway, thanks to the help of the whole team, it's true that I learned a lot from last year to manage the most critical situations, and therefore I scored a lot of valuable points."





# RETURN OF THE MARC

A CHAT WITH 93 COURTESY OF HRC

**You're just 23 years old, but you already have a lot of experience. Do you feel old?**

“‘Old’ isn’t the word! I still feel like I’m a boy, not yet a grown man! I’m still learning and I have many things to do in my career, in my life. We’re all human and maybe I’ll make more mistakes or repeat the same mistakes, but it’s true that year-by-year I’m getting more experience, not only on track, but also outside the paddock—learning how to manage the pressure during a racing weekend, how to organize the day-by-day things at home, the training time to be fit and ready for the races. I feel I’ve grown in these kinds matters.”

**Where can you still improve?**

“Not in a lot of things this year, as it’s been a great year. You always have weak points that you may improve, but if I have to give myself a grade I would say 9.5. The half-point off might be because of Le Mans. I made a mistake where I should’ve avoided it. Another mistake was to push too much where I shouldn’t have, like at Silverstone, even if I managed to save it and finished fourth. This year has been really good!”



## What does pressure mean for Marc Márquez?

"It's difficult to explain, but it's something that makes you insecure, that gives you doubts, makes you tense. It's something that wears you out mentally and physically, and you finish the weekend completely destroyed. Since all this tension just sucks so much energy out of you, you have to manage it. I'm very lucky to have a big family in the paddock, my team that helps me to disconnect when we're not just thinking about racing, and this helps me to stay relaxed."

## How important have the new rules been this season?

"They've been crucial, but despite the final result I must say that at the beginning of the season they were a big problem for us. In the beginning we were behind, and the winter tests were complicated. I had several meetings with Honda during which I promised them that I'd be more conservative and I focused on getting as many points as possible in the first races, but they had to help me in the second half of the season. I asked them to show everyone how Honda is able to react to challenges, because we were so far from our top level. And really, little by little, we've been cutting our gap to the others, which allowed us to have a very competitive RC213V in the last three races."

## Which day was the worst?

"During the Qatar test, near the end of the last day—and then we made a first step at the very end. During the season, the most difficult moment was at Le Mans. I had been able to win two races [in Argentina and Austin], but then I struggled a lot in Jerez and crashed out at Le Mans. With Lorenzo regaining the lead in the Championship standings again and the series headed to Mugello and Catalunya, I thought, 'It won't be easy!' As it happened, those races helped us to start to believe that the title was possible."

## You won the 2014 title in Motegi, your brother got his first win there and now you've won another title there. Why is Motegi so special for you?

"To be honest, I don't know! Maybe it's the special helmets we prepare for there [laughs]; maybe they bring me luck because it's not one of my favourite tracks and yet I've lived some amazing moments and experienced really unforgettable feelings there. Motegi isn't a track where I've had many victories, nor is it one where I feel especially comfortable, but it's one of the tracks where I have the best memories in my career!"

## If you have to pick up one race in the last nine years, what would it be?

"The race that I can't forget is Valencia 2013, when I was fighting for the MotoGP title for the first time and I was at home, but there's another race that I experienced from the outside but I felt as if I were racing myself. Again, it was at Valencia, but in 2014 when my brother won the Moto3 title. I don't know why, but I have it stamped in my mind, all every moment, all the passes."

## Describe the perfect Sunday if there's not a Grand Prix.

"I love spending them on a sofa [laughs], watching the Spanish Championship, MXGP, whatever, and in the afternoon maybe watching a football match, definitely one with Barça! We're always traveling around the world, so when you're at home you just want to rest and recharge the batteries."





MotoGP JPN



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# SBK

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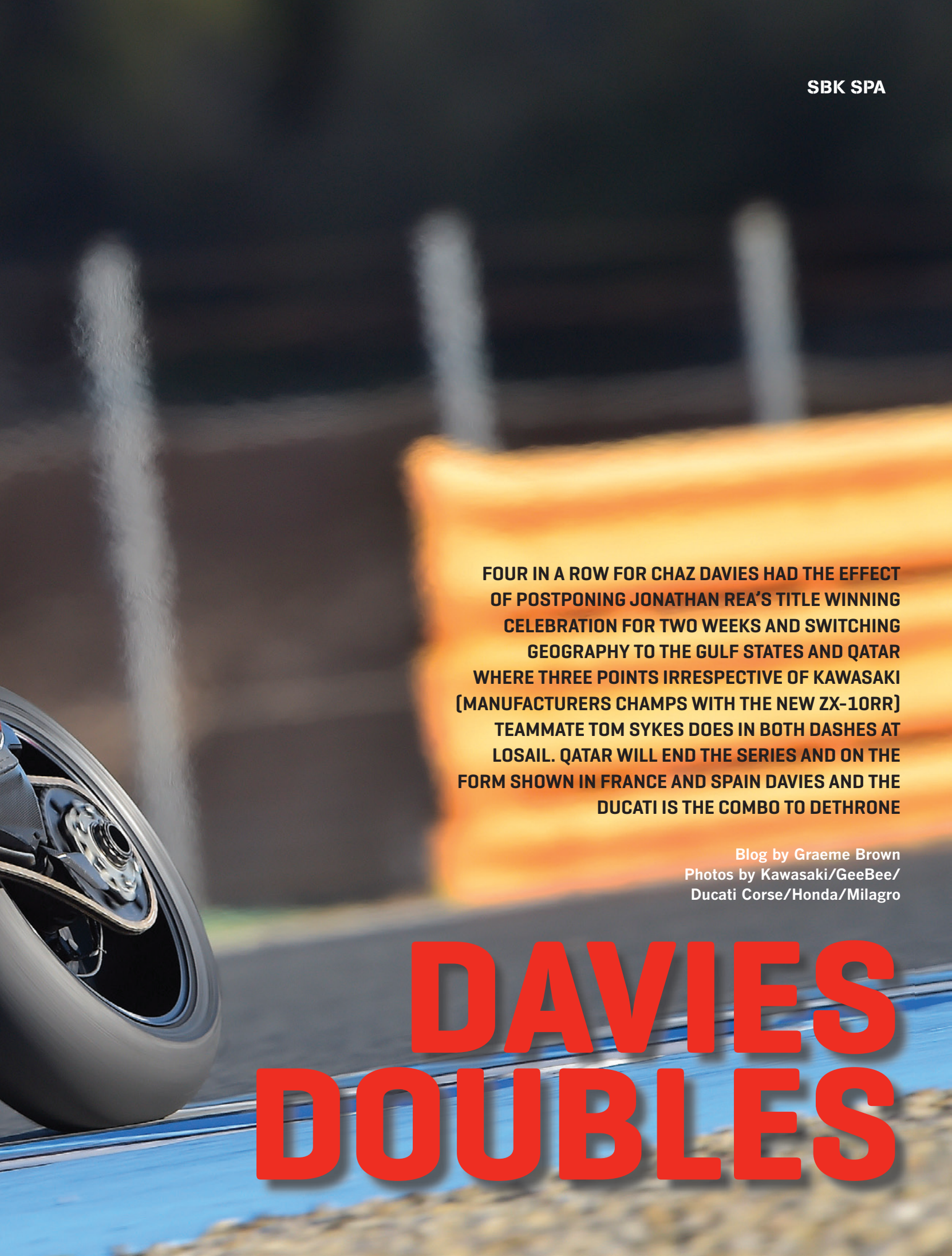
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Race one winner: Chaz Davies, Ducati

Race two winner: Chaz Davies, Ducati







**SBK SPA**

**FOUR IN A ROW FOR CHAZ DAVIES HAD THE EFFECT OF POSTPONING JONATHAN REA'S TITLE WINNING CELEBRATION FOR TWO WEEKS AND SWITCHING GEOGRAPHY TO THE GULF STATES AND QATAR WHERE THREE POINTS IRRESPECTIVE OF KAWASAKI (MANUFACTURERS CHAMPS WITH THE NEW ZX-10RR) TEAMMATE TOM SYKES DOES IN BOTH DASHES AT LOSAIL. QATAR WILL END THE SERIES AND ON THE FORM SHOWN IN FRANCE AND SPAIN DAVIES AND THE DUCATI IS THE COMBO TO DETHRONE**

Blog by Graeme Brown  
Photos by Kawasaki/GeeBee/  
Ducati Corse/Honda/Milagro

# **DAVIES DOUBLES**



64 WorldSBK races now held on the Iberian Peninsula and Jerez (maybe for the last time) heralded the latest set of trophies for Davies who had previously notched 10 podium finishes on Spanish soil











Plenty to think about for JR on the threshold of a second dominant term with Kawasaki. Even if absolute disaster strikes in Qatar then Sykes will still have to go some to wrestle title no.2 from his teammate



SBK SPA





# ALL OVER BAR THE SHOUTING...

By Graeme Brown

**T**he race weekend at Jerez passed more or less as I thought it would. All the championships within the WorldSBK series were wrapped up bar one - the main prize. The results played into Jonathan Rea's hands with his points total remaining the same as when he arrived in Spain. With only one round left and the arithmetic no longer adding up for Chaz Davies, it comes down to the last dice and a dual between the Kawasaki boys, Rea and Sykes. It is a bit of a one sided battle however as Rea only needs 3 points in race one to secure the crown.

If you discount the top three this year, the best of the rest are the Honda pairing of Van Der Mark and Hayden. Aside from the wet race at Lausitzring, the Hondas' are the only ones that have been able to break the monopoly of Kawasaki and Ducati's podium places.

With Honda's domination in MotoGP it is often felt that the WorldSBK team greatly underperforms, James Toseland last won the championship for them in 2007. What many people don't realize is that the current Superbike squad is essentially a private team and is a long way off of the full HRC effort that saw Kocinski and Edwards win their titles on the Castrol Honda machines.

Honda Europe's Head of Motorsport, Robert Watherston, was keen to have a chat with me on Sunday morning. He didn't want to talk about racing, however. As a fellow Scotsman he just wanted to gloat that his Glasgow Celtic had beaten my Motherwell 2-0 in the foot-

ball the day before. He wasn't getting off that lightly though and I asked him about the prospects for next year with the new Fireblade and the introduction of Stefan Bradl to the team, and I pointed out that fact that outside the top three his current riders were comfortably the next best.

He was pragmatic about the fact that in the Superbike class Honda always set out to build the best road bike possible. HRC have no involvement in the race machine development so it is up to individual teams to develop their own race package unlike Ducati, Kawasaki, Aprilia etc who have used the race programme to develop the road going models of their 1000cc superbikes; Kawasaki being the latest with the launch of the Ninja ZX-10RR at Inter-mot last week.

Watherston was quick to point out that Kawasaki's Superbike race programme is the best they have. They haven't had a MotoGP presence since 2008 so this is where all their knowledge and expertise is being channeled. He was extremely proud of the fact that the current Honda WSBK team has achieved everything as a purely European project. He acknowledged that Nicky Hayden has brought a new level of analysis to the team and I myself know that the mechanics have been amazed at just how much he wants to ride the bike, try different settings and push to be as fast as possible on each given day.





Hayden almost played a crucial part in settling the rider's championship at the weekend. If he had managed to get to, and pass Tom Sykes in race two, the title would have gone to Rea. What was interesting to me was that this was a race in what you would describe as 'normal' conditions and at the end he was lapping faster than the Kawasaki's. They themselves hadn't in anyway rolled off the throttle as Rea was desperately trying to keep Sykes at bay, who himself was pushing as hard as he could to keep his title hopes alive.

***“If the new bike is a step up, Honda could be in amongst the title fight next year...”***

It augurs well then that if - as Watherston suggests - the new bike is a step up, Honda could be in amongst the title fight next year.

There were various rumours around at the weekend about the calendar for next year with nearly all of the permanent journalists having face time with Championship Director, Daniel Carrera. It would seem that the round at Sepang is indeed dead and buried. A couple of interesting options have come up however.

Dorna had inherited some financial woes from Infront Sport over the race at Portimao and the position apparently didn't approve over the next few years, hence it's exclusion from the calendar this season. It would seem that an agreement has been reached with the local authorities and promoters in terms of finances and its place on the calendar may be re-instated in 2017. Another circuit ready to make a possible return is Brno in the Czech Republic. A hugely popular venue for riders, teams and fans it would be a welcome addition to the series. Sadly it's seems this weekend's race in Jerez will be the last. The current contract has come to an end and there would appear to be little desire to renew it. Dorna are keen to have another race in Spain and discussions are taking place with Valencia and possibly also Montmelo at Barcelona.

The wildcard entry for next year would be Argentina. Dorna's technical Director Gregorio Lavilla has visited the track, Autodromo Villicium, in San Juan. Construction has to be completed and the circuit homologated by the FIM but all concerned are confident that this will done and it should appear on the calendar for October 2017.

Currently there are ten rounds that have contracts for next year and the plan is to have a maximum of 14 so we will no doubt see some developments over the coming weeks. So we are literally on to the last leg and the final race under the floodlights at Losail. I will need to be creative if I am going to find my little glass of Sunday night sherry there however.





# PRE-MIX GETS A REMIX

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JASON THOMAS & FLY

By Adam Wheeler  
Portraits by Ray Archer

# HIGH FLY-ER

RENOWNED FOR HIS COMPETITIVE GRIT, DRY BROADCASTING WIT, SHREW OBSERVATIONS ON THE RACING SCENE THAT HE WAS A PART OF FOR ALMOST TWO DECADES AS AN ATHLETE AND NOW MAKING SUCCESSFUL MOVES FOR FLY RACING AND WESTON POWER SPORTS, JASON THOMAS IS STILL VERY MUCH A MAN IN A SPOTLIGHT. WE TALKED TRANSITIONS, LEGACY, COMPETING AND CHANGE...



**L**ife after racing and competition: a daunting step for many athletes. In the last issue with OTOR we spoke with Gareth Swanepoel on his transition into an attention-grabbing personal trainer/tutor and this time it's Western Power Sports and Fly Racing's Jason Thomas that we wanted to put in front of a Dictaphone. JT waded through a Pro career for sixteen years at the peak of AMA Supercross and Motocross and was prolific through international and European Supercross meetings; twice earning titles in Germany and becoming known as a determined American 'gun for hire'. He is perhaps best known to a new and younger generation as the voice of calm and reason (except when irked for the last half a decade at the Motocross of Nations and Team USA's inability to rule the historic competition once more) on Steve Matthes' relentless stream of PulpMX Podcasts as well as his frequent writings for seminal American website RacerX.

When we remarked recently that the 37 year old was busy in the paddock in his role for Fly – now four years learning the 'other' business side of racing – one MXGP star said to us: "Jason Thomas? Oh man, he used to try so hard..." It is perhaps this intensity as a racer that attracted the overseers of WPS to Thomas' availability and potential, and how an articulate and purposeful individual is now making strides with a spreadsheet and portfolio as opposed to a throttle cable.

For Thomas the immense Fly catalogue meant another 'field' he could sink his teeth into. While the brand seems intent on a more global presence (they have stepped up activation and presence in MXGP for example) there has been more than enough for the Floridian to grasp in North America alone and his progress has been such that the man is identifiable with the marque.

How did Thomas merge from one livelihood into another? How did speed translate into sales know-how and how does he feel about his career and place in the industry? All questions thrown at his way in between grimaces at Maggiora...

**OK, you were renowned for being ever-present on the track and competing around the globe so how did the link with Fly begin?**

I was leaving the Arenacross series and re-joining Supercross in the spring of 2003. I joined the Subway/Coca Cola Honda team. They had an agreement with Fly Racing and it was kinda news to me. They brought the gear to my first event of the year. I was like 'okay, I don't know anything about the brand, I don't know anything about the gear but that's fine'. Those were early days for Fly as far as production and quality goes. They were still learning. I followed the program all the way through those early years where the gear was falling apart at times while we're wearing it. It was almost trial-and-error and experimenting at the races with products. They didn't have many riders, so there was a lot of focus put on our team. Andrew Short was a big part of that as well. So it started humbly. I didn't know them and they didn't know me but it kind of grew year after year.

**Were they receptive in the beginning to feedback? How was the attitude of the company?**

They were. They knew that this was a new proposition and Supercross racing is a big jump. The riders demand a lot. They're not always the 'softest' with the way feedback is given. But I was pretty kind with that stuff. They were willing to make changes and they wanted to learn and grow, more than anything. They came into it with the approach that 'we know we're not perfect and we know we have a long way to go, and if we can take rider feedback and apply it then we can become very good'.



JASON THOMAS & FLY





I like that. And I liked that they didn't have the wrong attitude where they felt like they had it all figured out and if the product wasn't perfect then it was more the rider's fault than theirs. They were willing to take any feedback good or bad and any blame good or bad and try to make things better. That's important I think in the early days.

**How did you see the growth? From '03 when you first started and then you hit the economy crisis years and then recovery. What was your take on it?**

It was interesting. I think they were fortunate that they had a big distribution company behind them. If you look at all the big companies other than Fox, everyone is distribution-based as a parent company. So they have resources and funding and all these things to push it through, even in the lean years. But I think Fly did it the right way. They took small steps and they didn't get ahead of themselves as far as overextending with hiring riders or devoting too many resources to the brand. They took the necessary steps each year. They had a nice plan of where they wanted to be and how could they achieve it, without putting themselves in real jeopardy. It took a long time. Looking back over the years and seeing where they were not only in 2003 but then 2008, 2009 really tough years... they just continued the path they were on. I'm sure at times on paper it may not have made sense, especially in those American economy crisis years. But it all kind of snowballed: you get the designers you want and then your look starts to become better and then your volume starts to come up a bit, and then you can get into the factories that you really want to. Each element takes the other to take the next step. The biggest problem - that I could see - is that we could never get the quality we wanted because we weren't in the factories that we wanted. Our volume wasn't high enough so it wasn't attractive enough. It was this big 'Catch 22' where you needed one to get to the other. Once you started getting the ball rolling and all the things started to fall in line, life became very easier and better very quickly.

**What was the factor that got the ball rolling? Do you think it was a turnaround in design or a marketing ploy?**

I think it was a slow process. I think it was the fact that volume slowly started to come up and we started expanding our product line. We got better designers over time. It wasn't an overnight, one-step deal. It was very, very slowly. I obviously have the privilege where I can go back and look at our sales history through the years and it was very slow and methodical to point where we could finally go to our most desired factory. Finally they took a chance on us and that was maybe 2010-2011 when we kind of made that jump. They are more than happy with what we've been able to acquire for them since then. It's been an interesting journey. I really think the underlying key though was that Fly had a plan and even when it may not have financially made sense to stick to the plan they had faith in it and kept it the whole way.

**One of the strongest assets for Fly seems to be the vast catalogue of products through various motorcycling disciplines. Is that also quite a big thing to co-ordinate and evaluate? Almost a burden to have so much?**

Yes and no. I know for warehouse spacing and having a lot of money tied up in product then it could be a burden...but it's also very important for the growth of the brand. I feel as a brand - just as you said - if you looked at a catalogue then we can service a dealer better than anyone else because our product range is so extensive. To really, really be taken seriously we felt we had to be able to walk into any dealer world-wide and say "whatever product you're requesting on the off-road market, we have it, whether it's a hard part accessory or a tool your bike or a high-end motocross helmet...virtually anything and everything that you could ever want to go riding your off-road motorcycle we can offer it for you." That's something that a lot of other competitive brands and some of our biggest competitors cannot offer. I understand their thought process in that they want to minimize their exposure and really focus on key items. But for us we feel like off-road motorcycling



is such a broad spectrum. Most of our business is made up of people that just love riding motorcycles. The high-end motocross racing, club racing, that's a very small percentage of our real business. So we cater to the people that just enjoy motorcycles and when they get off work they want to go ride for an hour in the woods. That's a huge portion of our business and we try to make that reflective in the products we offer.

### **How do you think people see Fly? How do you think they perceive it?**

I think a perspective on the brand is continually evolving. I know how I first saw it in those early days, and I think most people were the same. It was an entry-level company creating entry-level products aimed at a specific price point. I think we've worked very, very hard to change that point of view. It's an on-going education process but really until people try it for themselves and have that unique experience for themselves it's really hard for them to really get the grasp of it. We can market it, we can talk about it, we can do interviews and we can put TV commercials and do all that but until they really try the product for themselves and see it as a high-end item it's really tough to fully 'get' it. So that's been a big focus of mine. Quite frankly the product has gotten so much better it's made my job easier. I can - with full confidence - walk up to anyone and say: "Try this product. If you hate it, tell me, but I really, really don't think you will." We see that with our involvement with MXGP with guys like Shaun Simpson. Going into that process of signing a guy like Shaun I was fully confident that we had a very, very good product to offer him because otherwise I wouldn't have done it. I feel the worst thing you can do is get in over-your-head and sign a rider like that when you're not ready. It does so much more damage than good, because everyone he talks to is like, "man, this product's not so good." That does no one any good. The biggest thing to do before anything else was get the product good. Once you have that then you can go out and spread the word to the masses and stand behind it with confidence.

### **The next natural obstacle is international growth. In the U.S. Fly is a recognized brand but it's not to the same degree elsewhere, certainly in Europe. Is expansion outside of the USA a priority for the company? Or could Fly live happily ever after just in North America?**

Sure, we could, but really we want to be a globally recognized company. The most challenging difficulty on that end is through having unique distributors in each country around the world. Our business is not set up where some other countries can just directly dictate their marketing. For us it's a little bit more complicated because we need cooperation between, say, the UK and Germany and Spain and Italy and to have everyone work as a cohesive unit and that is not always easy. You have a lot of different cultures. You have a lot of different people with different objectives, and some companies are very content to do well in their country but on the world stage, on the MXGP stage, that's not really that important. For other countries it's very, very important. They want to have an MXGP guy. They see Western Europe branding as a very big thing for their specific country, so having those people all agree on how we spend marketing dollars and how they work together and their presence at maybe their home country's GP, it's not always easy. Our owner luckily has made some commitments on his own end. This was our first year of involvement with MXGP specifically with Youthstream and they've done a great job for us. I feel like they have exceeded what was expected of them. That was awesome to see. I kinda promised them that our goal is to become more involved globally. Fortunately our growth in the United States has afforded us some abilities to invest in other areas. That's kinda been a new concept for us because before we always were dependent on each country to do their own marketing. So we've taken the initiative there and have absolutely asked our distributors to work with us to help. It's exciting for me - this is the first year that, as a brand, we've said: "okay, we're going to take the responsibility. We're going to get involved directly." Hopefully everyone benefits but we see it as a big enough priority that we're





willing to invest...even if it doesn't make sense mathematically or financially and we're going to try to grow this thing.

**Professionally, you transitioned out of being a rider into this Sales and Management role for Fly. How was that? Was it pretty tough to get a handle initially or did you find you had an aptitude for it?**

It was [tough]. I can remember, and I tell people at the office all the time - especially some of the newer guys that I've hired that were racers - that in my first week I still remember being at my downtown condo in Idaho and I didn't really have a lot of friends and I had just gone through my first full week of learning and

being trained and I had no idea what I was doing. Sitting on my couch Friday night. I had a beer in my hand. It was like 6pm. I was like, 'how am I ever going to do this? I don't understand how anything works. I don't understand this system that the company runs. I don't understand literally anything that you brought up - I didn't understand it.' I couldn't grasp the scope of how it worked. It was a really disappointing day for me. I was scared more than anything. I had this great opportunity...but I didn't know if I could mentally come to terms with it. It's just one of those things where I stayed with it and I studied and I tried to absorb every bit of information that was handed to me, even if I didn't fully understand it at the



time I would write it down and come back to it a month later and say: now do I get it. Finally all the business jargon started to make sense. I would connect A to B and the stuff started to work. But it was very, very tough in the early days. I was just lucky that I had people around me that believed in me and were patient. Had they not been then it could have a case of: 'this is not working out...' I didn't go to business school. I didn't have a ton of sales experience, or any sales experience. So it was a huge investment on their part. I never stop learning but I'm capable now and I'm up to speed now and it's my turn to repay them on their investment. I'm trying to do that every day.

**What did they see in you?**

I think they saw my ability to walk into a dealership and have instant credibility, which is very important. Any dealership worldwide is always inundated with sales representatives from every company. So it's just a recurring theme for them and they are almost numb to that sales pitch. Every day someone's in there pitching something. But I can come in and they know me from racing or they know me from the Pulp MX Show or they know me from writing in magazines or some sort of way. That makes them listen. Whether they know me or not they're willing to trust me a little bit more and my credibility goes up. So if I say, "hey, I have all this exposure. If this doesn't work you have plenty of ways to call me out on it or expose me." They're much more willing to believe me, and I have their ear. So I think that was what Fly saw. Even if I didn't realize it at the time, they knew that. They kind of thought, 'well, we can teach him enough to make him worthwhile. Where he takes that, that's up to him and the sky is the limit on potential from what we're willing to give him.' I've done everything in my power to learn, and to their credit they've given me every opportunity to grow in the company as well.

**Did you ever find someone or a group of people with the attitude of 'this is a rider, what does he know?'**

Absolutely. That's the overwhelming theme at first. There are a lot of people with that 'ambassador' role in this industry. That's all well-and-good but I felt to have any longevity and to really succeed I needed to become completely emerged in the business side. That's where you add value. For me I wasn't ever good enough in racing that I could live on those credentials forever. There was going to come a time, and I'm sure it's happening now, where people are like: "I didn't know you raced..." So I have to be more capable and successful on the business side so it makes sense to keep me around and continue my growth. Honestly, I wasn't content being the guy that just walks out, waves and goes back. That doesn't interest me. I always want to be pulling my own weight in any position and I want to be considered valuable, and to have longevity at the company I'm in. I want to grow as the company grows. That's really what I look for. The competitive side of me comes out any time, whether I'm selling into a store or whether I'm sitting here at the table and Jeff Emig and I are talking about Fox versus Fly or Shift versus Fly. We're competitive. It gets my competitive juices flowing again, which I kind of lost after racing.

**Can you give me an example of a move or a call you've made where it's worked out and you felt 'okay, I can do this...'?**

My first trip ever was two weeks into the job; I went to the International Dirt Bike Show in England. I can remember sitting with our distributor, Race FX there and he was bringing in dealers and race teams, and I was completely clueless. I couldn't answer questions. I didn't know any of the terms they were talking about with the paperwork to bring items into the UK from the factories. I told them straight to their face; "I've only just started...but I will take notes of everything we're talking about. I will go back and talk to the people that do



know and I will get you answers,” which I did. But it was still humbling to sit there and know nothing. You’re like the village idiot. But I was aware of it. I accepted it. I just vowed to fix that situation and not be that guy. It evolved to the point that I can go sit with Giuseppe [Luongo, Youthstream President] at the Motocross of Nations and talk business, talk international markets and how the gear industry is worldwide and how our exposure needs to be and what visibility means for us as a brand versus what it’s perceived by some companies. So that was fun. It was fun for me four years later to see my own growth. He could ask me questions about anything – tax forms for how we bring gear into countries, and what works and what doesn’t. I could answer. I know. I have the base of knowledge now and the experience. So that’s a great example for me because had that been four years ago I would have just been staring at him with a blank face, and it’s not a nice feeling!

**Now you’ve made this new career and spoken to a lot of different people...what kind of perspective do you have on your career?**

The biggest thing for me is I have learned to take it [life] less seriously. When you’re immersed in that [racing] world that’s all you know and that’s all you’re worried about. You have such tunnel vision for racing at the time. As I’ve gotten out of that I’ve realized what really drives the sport is the business side behind it. I’ve realized that my role in racing at the time - if I was a tenth place guy or a twelfth place guy or whatever - was important but not that important. I learned what I could have done better to help my sponsors and what I did very poorly on some aspects. Some things I was okay at, but more than anything my horizons are so much broader now. It’s funny because I’ll go back and I’ll talk to riders now – some of the riders we sponsor, and I’m friends with riders we don’t sponsor – and I get into conversations about some of these things and I flash back to how I thought then and my perspective was then, and I see the

same perspective in them. You want to tell them...but you know it’s just going to go on deaf ears. I smile to myself because I say: “that’s what you think now, but when you’re five years removed from racing and you are looking at the sport in a different light and you’re looking at it from an outsider’s perspective...” because I live in that world selling and doing business with people who aren’t inside the industry, it’s just a completely different perspective. It’s interesting how you never stop growing and learning. You think you have it all figured out when you’re racing and you’re so important. You step back... and sure, those guys are still in the limelight and I’m a fan more than anything, but you start to learn you really didn’t know everything. You honestly had no idea what was driving the sport on the business side that’s allowing these races to actually happen; the people that is pulling the strings behind the scenes to engage the crowd that’s here and sell products in the store. There’s a whole underworld of business that’s going on that the riders don’t care or don’t know about.

**Did it make you realize how unusual it is to be a racer?**

It did. It’s a very small little subculture that the racers have. They make the most money. There are obviously businesses that are making money...but in the industry they’re making a lot of money.

**It’s a desirable lifestyle...**

It is...but it’s a very fickle lifestyle and it can be pulled away from you in an instant and it leaves you with not else. You think that as a rider you’re so important, you’ll just go make money doing something else...and it’s not always the case because they haven’t been exposed to the real business of the industry. They are a big draw for the races but on Monday the business goes on that creates all the money that drives the sport and they’re not a part of that. It’s just an interesting change of perspective that I hope more racers get to see. But it would be funny to take a racer, fast





JASON THOMAS & FLY

forward ten years into his life and let him live for a couple months and gain perspective and then bring him back to racing. I think they would be a completely different person and approach situations and fans and the team and sponsors and enjoy racing more. That's one thing I never did. I did not enjoy racing. It was a job and I was nervous. Now I can go back and be like: it's not a big deal! I got 19th instead of 11th today; it's not a big deal. But at the time it was life or death. I would dwell on it until the next Friday.

**Do you think you needed to dwell on it?**

It drove me. But I think I would have been a happier person if I didn't! I would have been more fun to be around and I would have had a smile on my face more than I did. I was so serious about it that I didn't enjoy it. I spent a lot of years not really enjoying what I was doing. I didn't really realize how fortunate I was. Of all the things I've ever done my only regret was that I didn't enjoy the ride a bit more. I was so

just focused on what I was doing and blocking out everything else that I didn't soak up experiences. Even now being somewhere like the Nations that's why I spend my own money at times hitting up these events. I can come back and truly, truly enjoy the experience of it whereas before I missed all that.

**Do you think teammates, mechanics and people from the past in your career would believe that you were capable of what you are doing now?**

I think some of them probably would have said 'sure' because they knew me. If you could wipe away all the worry and the stress of racing then I was the person I am now...but it took a lot for me to get here. I was so enveloped in racing and so worked up and stressed out. But some of my closest friends, I think they're not surprised. Probably some of the people that knew me but not really closely - all they saw was this outward stony face all the time, upset and angry and wanting to do better - they



probably would have been like: 'I don't see how he could ever deal with people and have a good, positive experience.' So it's probably both. Now all that [racing] pressure's gone I wake up every morning and I'm generally a happy person, where for a long time I wasn't.

**A lot of people are generally good at one thing. To be proficient at several things is kinda unusual I guess. Did you see any peers – or any riders now – that are worried about the next step? Life after racing...**

I think so. Looking back I don't think I was ever that great at racing. I think I found a niche in a couple of areas, where if European Supercross was the pinnacle of racing in the world, I would have been a superstar...but unfortunately it wasn't. I was decent at American racing but not anything great. So I felt like it was always a challenge. It didn't come easily ever. I always had to work. I felt like I worked harder than the next guy and that's why I was able to do okay. If I had done the average level effort I would have had to quit years before I did. I feel like it was something that didn't come perfectly natural to me...but I think this role whether it's PR stuff or sales specifically, is more natural to me. I feel more comfortable in my own skin doing this. But I feel like there are niches to be found. Finding them is the difficult thing. Take Grant Langston for example. He was world champion. He was an incredible talent at racing. You look at the spectrum of titles he won. It's truly amazing to think he was able to do that and then go to where he's at now which I feel like he may be even better. He was a world champion but I feel in his role as a commentator, he may be the best in the world currently. The unique perspective he offers, the way he is able to integrate comedy, transition... He does things that television specialist guys do. He can segue in and out of the breaks and do all that. So I think he's very fortunate that he's found his next niche as well. I think that's the key: being able to identify what you're good at, and pursuing it and being able to accomplish it. I do feel like there are really talented peo-

ple in racing that maybe sales or the business side isn't perfect for them but they have other skills. It's just being able to identify and go out there.

**You've raced and had success in front of crowds. You've signed autographs for kids, been someone's hero...Do you think with what you're doing now there's an equal chance, if not better, to make a real impact, make something that is lasting?**

I think so. That's what I'm working towards. The first day I got hired I was with our CEO and our vice president and the guy that hired me and I told them: "this is going to be an investment on your part and an educational process for me...but just so we're clear on day one I'm in this for the long haul." I picked up and moved my life all the way across the United States, 4,000km away to do this. I moved away from my family. I had no friends. I didn't know anyone there. So I told them I'm all in on this and be patient with me and I promise you I will pay you back plus much more of what you invest in me. I feel like I can [make an impact]. I feel like with the momentum the brand has, with the momentum Western Power Sports has with our increasing involvement in Supercross and Outdoors and MXGP and every racing aspect, plus some of the unique avenues I have - media and other things - I think I have a chance to cross a lot of different streams as far as how I can bring value. My end goal is that I'm associated with Fly specifically and Western Power Sports and a couple other brands we're becoming more and more involved with for a long time. I kinda want to be that guy. Take Jeff Emig for example, he's been with Shift for 20 years. Maybe he's not as directly involved in the sales side as I am but still lasting relationships where you become... synonymous. And that's what I want. So when you think of Fly Racing you think of me, and when you think of me you think of Fly Racing. If I can accomplish that I feel like I'll add the most value to my career that I possibly could.



## WHO ARE FLY RACING?

Established back in the 1960s Western Power Sports accumulated experience of manufacturing and the know-how and foundation of distribution platform to look towards the launch of their own brand and Fly Racing was born in 1997 with the production of handlebars. They worked on researching and associating with the right vendor to be able to offer a better product at better value and swiftly branched into other components such as chest and knee protection to levers and grips and then their first helmet (the '747' keeping very much in spirit with the Fly theme) two years later. It was in April 1999 that Fly presented their first collection and a pant-jersey-glove combination and sparked a period of furious commitment to the market and the garments. The 805 boot was delivered and very well received in 2000. WPS housed the intention to be a global brand and leant on their international distribution organisation to eventually build a network of

some forty countries; a web they still want to expand. Production of Fly products followed the general manufacturing trends and fabrication went from Taiwan to Korea then to China, then Vietnam and Indonesia and back. "Certain technical items are so important to make in a factory that really 'gets' that product," says VP of Sales Terry Baisley. Growth went hand in hand with development and sourcing of materials and then building a heritage in a racing programme. The Fly Racing catalogue encompassed vast streams of off-road, trail and into Adventure Touring and finally a full Street line-up. "Our goal has been to make a better product, a safer product and something that will help you enjoy your ride more, at a price that would work for the average person as well as the guy with no budget," says Baisley. "Where Fly is going in the future is really exciting."





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## THE COLOUR OF MONEY...

By Steve Matthes

**T**he annual Monster Energy Cup took place over the weekend in Las Vegas and this year's edition had some mega-watt star power show up but behind that the field might've been its weakest since the races inception.

The big news was the racing debut of Ken Roczen on the Honda as well as the bummer of Roczen's Euro-teammate Tim Gajser dropping out after crashing at the SMX cup last weekend. Roczen, wearing the #1 signifying the defending champion, was the must-see. Could he adapt to the Honda? Monster Kawasaki's Eli Tomac was there as was Red Bull KTM teammates Ryan Dungey and Marvin Musquin, straight back from the SMX Cup race. Roczen's teammate Cole Seely and Yamaha's Chad Reed who promised me before the event that he was actually going to try at this race...unlike other years!

This MEC is designed and thought of to be anything BUT an 18th Monster Energy Supercross. It incorporates a Joker Lane that a rider has to take one time per main, has three ten lap main events, the normal rules of homologation don't apply, teams can run data sensors on their bikes and the race features top amateur racers along with a Supermini class.

And for the last couple reasons I listed, the track is tamed down considerably from a regular supercross. This makes the race definitely a little different although it also hurts the action a bit in that the 450 riders aren't challenged.

The one new edition this year was a start that began on top of the stadium and dropped down dramatically all the way the length of the floor. The riders were hitting speeds of over 70mph according to a team data guy I spoke to and the

big debate among the pack was second or third gear out of gate (Roczen went with third, Tomac went second). I thought we might see carnage with the speeds going into the first turn but outside of one amateur race (not shocking) the riders kept it under control. It was certainly a very shocking visual and a very cool one at that to see a pack of 22 riders flying down a hill and roaring into a small left-hand turn.

In the end, any fears people had of Roczen not getting comfortable on the new ride didn't materialize as he easily won two of the three main events. He was on his way to the second main event win when he went over the bars in a rhythm lane that had to have all the Honda crew holding their breath as their million dollar rider jumped off and the brand-new CRF450 went cartwheeling down the track.

Fortunately for Kenny, his body down-sided a jump perfectly and he was unharmed. Although the bike, with the new Honda electric start option mounted, refused to, uhhhh, start and he was done. Roczen lined up for moto three and from the far outside almost pulled the holeshot then checked out. 1-DNF-1 for Roczen on the new bike. He wasn't THE winner but he was, without a doubt, a winner from the MEC.

The real taker of the 100K first prize was Tomac who went 2-1-4 for the overall. A poor start held him back from the third moto podium but he was the second best rider of the night. Tomac's now won his last three races (two USGP's and the MEC) as him and the Kawasaki seem to be adapting to each other a little better lately. With Roczen's mishap, Dungey was in position to top the podium until Tomac cut through the pack and coming off his SMX Cup victory where



he used his usual consistency to triumph without winning a moto, it looked like he was going to do it again. Still, second overall for Dungey with some quiet rides as he begins prep to defend his 2016 450SX crown.

This race is always pretty eventful but 2016's version won't go down as that memorable. It might've been something had Roczen struggled or more riders lined up for it but as it is, just three weeks after getting on his new bike, Roczen looks as good as ever and with a depleted field of riders for different reasons, we got pretty much what we thought we would. Still, it's a good time to shake things out for the teams, debut new sponsors, get some time under your belt and in the end, nothing counts. But soon enough, it will.

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In other news we saw JGR Yamaha announce a switch to Suzuki for 2017 and beyond. It was a pretty big deal over here as the powerhouse team based out of North Carolina had been blue ever since starting-out in 2007. It's interesting to talk to everyone on all the sides about the ins and outs of this deal coming together.

Suzuki had announced earlier that Yoshimura Suzuki, its main factory team had folded. They stepped up support to RCH Suzuki for the 450 class and was working on a 250 partner when the JGR announcement came that alongside two 450 riders, the team was also going to field two 250 riders also.

The 250 riders will have Yoshimura-supplied motors which eases JGR's workload a bit and I would imagine Suzuki would pay the 250 riders

salaries but the announcement of this JGR 250 effort makes it seem very likely that Suzuki's 2016 team of Motorcycle Superstore is going away. Losing a team in the pits is never a good thing.

Justin Barcia, a critic of the Yamaha YZ450F, is presumably going to happier now that he's on yellow and the team's other rider Weston Peick enjoyed success on the RM-Z a couple years ago on the RCH team.

Interesting that sources close to the situation indicate that Suzuki's offer to JGR was far worse than that from Yamaha but relations between JGR and Yamaha were strained enough that JGR wanted out. Whether it was Yamaha coming back with their factory team and outbidding JGR for North Carolina's own Cooper Webb, some sponsor conflicts, poor communication or something else, it's clear that JGR was looking to go in another direction.

So Suzuki picks up two world class 450 riders, another one for the outdoors in Phil Nicoletti to go along with the RCH program (to be announced any day now) while Yamaha goes into 2017, barring any last minute team pick-ups, with just Webb and Chad Reed and then come outdoors, just Webb. Does this change flip a switch in Justin Barcia's supercross results? Can JGR get the RM-Z up to speed fast enough? What does Yamaha do now? To me, this is one of the more interesting questions that won't be answered for a few months.





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Trooper

## ATLAS

A look at Atlas Air brace, and the five offerings (Abstract, Radioactive, Baller, Trooper and Twister) currently available from the stylish line-up of their premium product that weighs only 600gs and has a revised easy opening mechanism. Atlas claim the Air has reduced in size and boasts the selling tag that 'the best design is one you hardly notice' but it still has 27% more contact with the body than the competition. Customisable and slim; there has to be a reason why HRC rider Evgeny Bobryshev elected for the Air when deciding to use neck protection once more in MXGP this year.

For more information look here:  
[www.atlasbrace.com/atlas-air/](http://www.atlasbrace.com/atlas-air/)







Radioactive



Baller





**D**

**FEATURE**

# FIRST LADY

By Adam Wheeler  
Photos by Ray Archer

WMX HAS BEEN BOOSTED, SHUFFLED AND REALIGNED IN ALMOST TEN YEARS OF EXISTENCE AND IN THAT TIME LIVIA LANCELOT HAS WON, LOST, ENDURED AND SUFFERED SOME OF THE CRUELLEST LUCK THAT RACING CAN THROW AT A PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE. IN THE FACE OF PERHAPS HER HARDEST COMPETITION YET THE FRENCHWOMAN TRIUMPHED IN 2016, TWELVE MONTHS AFTER A NIGHTMARE SCENARIO IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC



WMX WORLD CHAMP: LIVIA LANCELOT







**FEATURE**







Unwillingly, 28 year old Livia Lancelot provided one of the harshest narratives in FIM World Championship motocross just over a year ago. The Kawasaki and Fox Racing rider is known for her longevity on the Grand Prix scene, for being the very first Women's World Champion back in 2008, for running her own team through the seven round WMX series and for attempting events like the Le Touquet Beach Race and competing with the guys at Lille-Paris Supercross but she's also known for the heartbreak at the Grand Prix of Czech Republic in the summer of 2015. Leading by four points ahead of Kiara Fontanesi and in search of a second title the Parisian's race bike suffered a technical glitch on the sighting lap of the very last moto of the final round. The images of Lancelot sitting dejectedly next to the start gate, elbows on knees, helmet in hands as the rest of the field revved to start carried a deep poignancy. She had finished second in the first moto and was set to end a close season-long duel with the Italian before destiny dealt a hard slap.

This year Lancelot waded through the challenges posed by peers like Fontanesi, newcomer Courtney Duncan and Nancy Van der Ven to somehow clear all the angst and anguish of that emotional afternoon at Loket. 2016 belonged to the 114; a well-spoken, intelligent and thoughtful ambassador for her category and a suitable role model for the gaggle of girls that harbour ambitions of motorcycle racing glory and pack-out Women's World Championship fixtures at MXGPs each term.

WMX is part of the Grand Prix support card and there are obvious differences in physicality and speed compared to their male counterparts but to dismiss the class as mere frivolity is to ignore some of the most entertaining motos often found across a weekend programme. The level that Lancelot and her rivals push at the front of the field often means unpredictable and eminently watchable scenes. The 2015 French Grand Prix at Villars sous Ecot being a case in point as Lancelot jumped past Fontanesi to win by a mere tenth of a second.

The amount of girls making their presence felt in the Grand Prix paddock – from professional set-ups to the basic bikes-from-the-back-of-the-van efforts – indicate that there is a market and desire for WMX to exist and to thrive.

For the moment the world champion is at the very peak of tree she has climbed and sat perched for the better part of a decade. Sitting down to talk at the Motocross of Nations and she has keen observance on her position in the sport and the anxiety of Loket 2015 clearly made a mark on her psyche; something she managed to partially rub away this year. Several weeks earlier at the Fox 'Ceremony of Speed' event at Irvine in California and she was comfortably at home on stage with Ryan Dungey, Tim Gajser, Ricky Carmichael and Jeff Emig and was able to drink in the spoils of having bookmarked the longest career at the highest level and the very first days of WMX; that began life with FIM 'Cup' status in 2005-2007.

**World Champion for the second time but it's been a while coming. Does that fact come into play when you think of the title and the level of satisfaction?**

Yeah. It was really weird actually when I got the title. I was the least happy from everyone else around me. Everyone was crying - my mom, parents, teammates, the mechanic, everyone. I was happy of course...but I didn't have the feeling that everyone else had actually. I think it's because, like you say, it's been



so long that I'm fighting for it. And after what happened last year - that wasn't normal - it was just a moment where I was like, 'yeah, now it's done...' I was not even really happy about it! I was just more relaxed and calm. Like 'okay, now I have it.' So it's a really weird experience. The feeling is weird. This title is really different from the first one. I felt definitely more relaxed that I got the second one and I deserve it...and bad luck will not follow me forever.

**Do you feel a little bit like a survivor in the series? People like Katherine Prumm burned very bright but dropped away. Stephanie Laier won a lot, dropped away. Larissa Papenmeier went away and then came back, whereas you always tended to be at the top...**

Yeah, and if you look at the first year in 2005 - the first cup - and who was there and who is still on the top, I'm the only one. Yes, definitely I can say that I'm the survivor or the 'Vet' or whatever but I'm happy to still be here because motocross is a big passion for me. It's not only a job but a passion. I'm living for it every day. So I'm happy to still be able to race, to race on top and to be there.

**Still, it must take a lot of physical and mental effort, as well as looking even at the bank balance at the end of the year and thinking, 'I've been racing all year but it hasn't been that fantastic...' It must be hard to do it sometimes.**

For sure it's hard. With the budget and everything it's pretty hard. If you're not winning at the end of the year it's not like there is a lot of money left on the table. So this is the tough part actually because you have to work pretty hard and give everything and sometimes in the end you have nothing back. Okay, I'm living with more Pros [than Cons] but I'm not living crazy. I'm just having an average lifestyle, let's say. When you want something really badly I think you can easily forget all the hard work and sacrifice and everything that you have done because afterwards you get what you really want: to be on the top and get the title.

Even if in 2015 I didn't get it, I had so much support from everyone and a lot of things came back from this [bad luck]; it was useful. All the work that I did, even if I was only vice champion, I was still quite happy because of what I put in. So I don't think that you have to see the bad side. I could be working every day behind a desk like my mum is doing. She's out of the house for twelve hours a day. I definitely prefer to be on the bike.

**After many years of trying to scale this sport again were there times when the motivation went down a little bit? Maybe you were looking at different paths?**

It's not like I raced the world championship every year and have just kept on going. I stopped for three years. I did X Games and it was a lot different. This gave me a different motivation because I was in America and I led some big races in France. 2014 was a year of coming back to GPs so I couldn't expect to win again directly. I finished third, and then last year was when I was fighting for the title. So finally it happened pretty fast. It's not like I've been fighting for ten years to get one title. It was a lot of different things and a lot of different seasons, so it gave me all the time the motivation to work hard again.





**Now you can look back on it what was the cause for moving away from the world championship?**

First of all it was about money because the championship was paired with MX3 and it was definitely not possible for me to make a complete budget...and it's not like my parents can help me. So I just couldn't. So I found a way to keep riding and do something else. That's why I started to look for Le Touquet [beach race] because it's really big in France so I could find some sponsors for that, and then the X Games. It was the first reason I moved...because the world championship was not that interesting anymore when I came back.

**Do you think it's essential that WMX stays with Grand Prix, MX2 and MXGP? Imagine if it was still a separate series...**

It would be really different. You can see this in America. From the moment that the girls were moved away from the Outdoors everyone stopped. You don't hear anything about it. You don't even know who is champion. There is still a championship but nobody knows about it. I think for us it's the same. If it drifts away from MXGP for sure I'm not going to race anymore because the sponsors are not going to be interested. It's already not enough but if you go for nothing it's too hard. It's not possible.

**Have you found it easier in the last three years to talk to sponsors? Have you found there's more interest in you? Have you discovered a few tricks? If I think back to your Team Presentations and fans initiatives in France then these were inventive ways that nobody else was doing to get attention...**

Since the beginning and that first title I grew up a lot. I was 17 in the first year [of WMX] in 2005. I didn't know anything about all this; the talking with sponsors. I didn't even speak English at that moment! I couldn't really understand how it all worked, so I was just trying to find a team. Luckily there were a lot of French teams so I had the chance to ride for them and then for KRT [Kawasaki Racing Team] one year.

The sponsors were interested because at that moment I was a factory rider. When I was with Kawasaki I was factory and my contract was from Japan directly. It's not like this anymore. Since I decided to do my own team in 2014 I learned a lot about how to present myself, how to deal with the sponsors, how to get an image, to be good with the media. I learnt so many things and now I realize that it was definitely a good choice [to go solo] because when I look at my budget now and the budget of the team it's definitely much bigger than 2009 when I was a factory rider. It's much better. Now I can help a kid next to me. He is only 12 and he has no results for the moment. He has nothing but he is almost a factory rider already! He has these big shining eyes because he's so happy about it. I'm happy to be able to do it. I think this is a big improvement and an achievement for me to be able to do this now.

**In this paddock and with the brands present do you feel that being WMX world champion still holds a lot of value? If you look at someone like Kiara she won four titles for Yamaha and was seemingly cast off. Your relationship with Kawasaki is obviously good...but do you feel that they appreciate you as a champion?**

They definitely appreciate me and they respect me as a world champion...not only the Women's World Champion. When I talk with Kawasaki it's always with a lot of respect. Even if we are definitely not talking about the same contract as the guys, they have respect for me and they are helping me the best they can. It's also a matter of staying with the brand. Kawasaki also helped me in the years that I was not riding the world championship. I was not 'on the top' anymore and they were able to give me bikes and a little bit budget to be able to do the season and everything. So it's nice for me to be world champion with Kawasaki and not trying to go somewhere else for one more bike or just a little bit more budget. I feel good on the bike. I feel good with the people at Kawasaki. I don't want to change just to get a bit more money. If I stay with them I know that







**WMX WORLD CHAMP: LIVIA LANCELOT**

**“ONE THING IS FOR SURE: I LIKE WINNING. THE MOMENT THAT I WILL KNOW THAT I WON’T BE ABLE TO THAT THEN IT’S OVER. I CAN’T SACRIFICE ALL THAT I DO AND PUT IN ALL THE WORK IF I KNOW THAT I CANNOT WIN. AT THIS MOMENT WE ARE FOUR GIRLS FIGHTING FOR THE TITLE AND I’M STILL ABLE TO WIN. I WILL SEE NEXT YEAR HOW IT GOES...”**





even if next year something goes wrong and I finish outside of the top five then they will not fire me. Of course they will not give me the same as when I'm world champion! But they will still keep helping me. If you go somewhere else then you don't know what can happen.

**Have you felt the effects of being world champion yet? Maybe some more press back home or maybe even some more calls from Fox or other partners? Have you noticed a difference from say 2014 to this year?**

Last year was so different. I think I got more phone calls last year than this year! But it was so different. Honestly yes, I had a lot of support last year. It was great because I really needed it actually. It was cool to feel that people are around you, and not only when you are winning. It was a good experience on one side...but I can definitely 'feel' title now. When you are a world champion it makes the difference, definitely; when I went to Fox in America or Kawasaki or everywhere else actually like Yoshimura, all these brands. Also in the media, of course. Back home even at the GPs I did a lot of interviews with almost everyone and it's not like this at every round.

**Was it satisfying to close that nightmare chapter of 2015? There are some riders - Josh Coppins comes to mind - that almost got a championship; they had it in their hands. So was it a relief to bury that near-miss?**

Yes, definitely. Of course I'm thinking about retirement now more and more every year. Missing the title last year when it was almost mine, I was like; you never know what can happen. One more season, one more winter. Someone can just show up and then you're not going to be world champion. When I arrived in Qatar Courtney Duncan was already pretty fast. So I felt this pressure. I was thinking 'maybe I missed the last title I could catch...' Luckily I was not 100% in Qatar and it gave me this little hope that I could still be on top and still fight for the title. So this was good and, definitely, after the title now I feel more relaxed!

I would go for at least one more season. I will fight for it again. This is what I want...but on one side it also like a bonus. If I don't have it next year it's okay. It's not that bad. I'm not saying that I don't care or anything - I will work for it definitely as much as I can. I will give everything to get a third one and second in a row. I will push for that but I'm definitely more relaxed as well. Now it's not that bad anymore.

**It's been almost a decade of Grand Prix for you. Do you sometimes get out of bed and think: 'I can physically feel the races...'**

No, it's not that bad...but I had a lot of injuries, unfortunately. Both knees, shoulders... It's not like I was lucky in this respect however I always took time to come back. I have some great medical people behind me: a great surgeon and a physical therapist. So I have nothing bad lasting from injuries but of course after all these years of motocross sometimes when I wake up in the morning and it's kinda cloudy or humid outside I can tell you without opening the curtains!

**So it's better to be living in the south of France?**

It's good to be in the south of France. Now of course I can feel the years but like I said, I don't have anything too bad. My body is 100% and this is good.

**Would you say you're riding the best you've ever been? Or do you think back to 2009 or '11 or '12 and think 'that was my peak'?**

No, I think I'm better now than I was in 2009, for example. I definitely think that I'm stronger physically. Since Bruno Losito is working for me I improved so much with training and preparation. It's the first time that I have someone that is working 100% for me. I never had the possibility to pay a trainer before. In 2009 when I was fighting for the title and I was doing almost everything on my own I was hearing a lot about what I should do - or not - and getting advice from everyone. When it's like this then you can start to make some mistakes.





So it was not that easy. Since Qatar in 2014 I talked with Bruno. I knew him a long time but he ran a team before so it was not easy to get in touch with him. We started to talk in Qatar and we started working together after that. This guy has so much passion for motocross. He's giving everything he has - even more than what he has, actually. He's just crazy. He's helping me so much. He's following everything. Every day that I'm on the bike he can see it from the watch, on the computer. Checks all the lap times. Everything, everything. This is helping me because then we adjust the program if I'm tired. We are adjusting everything. I go to his house one week every month to get on more technical stuff, even on the suspension settings. So he's definitely helping me and I improved a lot with him.

**On that note was there one decision or 'switch' over the years that you had made and you thought, 'I wish I'd done that earlier'?**  
Not clearly one particular thing...but definitely

if I had Bruno on my side much earlier - I can't say I would have been ten times world champion because you never know - but I wouldn't have made so many mistakes like I did when I was younger. I can remember one in 2009. I won both motos in Ernée [Grand Prix of France]. I was leading the championship by 30 points I think or something similar. I had won five motos from six at this moment. I came back to Belgium and it was raining like hell. On Tuesday morning I wanted to go riding because everyone was out. At that time I was with Rui [Goncalves, MXGP rider and ex-boyfriend] and he was going. I woke up and I was tired and not feeling that good. I was still tired from the weekend. Only Lommel was open and I hate Lommel! So it was raining and the track was rough. All the signs were bad. If it was today, I would call Bruno and say, "it's not a good day. Can you just send a program on the bicycle or something? I will just do something else." Anyway I was alone. I went riding and crashed really hard and popped out my shoulder. I





believe that happened because I didn't have a trainer or someone guiding me. The trainer can feel when the rider is not having a good day. Sometimes you just have to stay home, stay calm. So it was a costly day. This season there were a few days where I was calling Bruno sometimes and I was like, "hey, you know what? I don't feel it. The track's not good..." It wasn't I stayed at home and doing nothing but I worked physically, I did something different.

**So what about WMX now? Are there any changes you'd like to see? I know maybe the timing of the motos is one thing...but do you have enough races? Would it be hard to make a budget to do 12 rounds instead of 7? Is the championship in a good place?**

I think we have enough rounds. When it goes to seven, eight races I think it's good enough because it could be hard to get budget to do more rounds. Maybe not for me...but for the girls that are, say, between fifth and fifteenth. I think it would be hard. So I think the amount of rounds is good. I wish that both motos could be on Sunday. It would be much, much better for us. I cannot forget the Grand Prix of

Switzerland this year. They changed the time schedule so that we had the second moto at I think 10:15 or 10:30 in the morning, and one of my biggest sponsors arrived at 11:00. It was over already. So he missed it. He didn't even see me ride that weekend. So things like that are not really cool because there is a lot of people that arrive at a race only on Sunday and maybe not at 10:00 in the morning, so we don't get this opportunity to be seen. I think it will be better to have both motos on Sunday but there are already too many classes. Another thing is that I think we are too many riders in the gate. It is too dangerous. The gap between the first rider and the last one is too big. If you take out the last fifteen girls that are really too slow, or dangerous for us, maybe the racing can be a little bit better. Perhaps it is a way to improve.

**Maybe a percentage rule, with 120% of your lap time?**

We already have qualifying so it's like the European [championship]. We have qualifying because sometimes we are almost 50 in the timed practice, which is pretty bad actually



and makes for a very busy track. So now it's like 40 on the gate. Why they just don't say 30 or even 20? I think that it would be better for racing...because then the gap between the first and the last one would be smaller and it would be more attractive.

**Are you happy with the tracks and the circuits? You went to MX3 and back to MXGP...**

I didn't notice much. I think that now it's not always perfect...but it's not that bad. From what we had this year and this season it was not that bad at all. I really enjoyed Switzerland. It was a really good race. I think we need a bit of everything. We need old tracks, like St Jean D'Angely – that has been there for I-don't-know-how many years - but also those artificial tracks are useful. On one side it's also the future to have the whole crowd around seeing everything. I think we only need to improve on a couple of things. Sometimes the watering is not that good and sometimes the setting for a rider is also not really 100%. So we can improve on some stuff I think but generally I'm not going to complain.

**Talking about the crowd, do you feel like a star when you walk around? You're like the Toni Cairoli for women's motocross. You're the person who's done most things and still at the top...**

No, I'm not this kind of person. I'm shy, and keep quite quiet. Of course when I'm in France it's exactly like you said. When it's the French GP I have to find ways to not be in the middle of the paddock, otherwise it takes me forever to go from my camper to the van or to the press room. It's quite crazy, actually. I have a lot of supporter and friends and also in other countries but mostly in France.

**Are you a quite happy person? Do you feel professionally content with what you have done?**

I have no regrets. Even about what I was saying before about the trainer. Of course being with someone like Bruno would have been better but I don't regret anything. I did the best I could with what I had. Now it's the same. I'm happy to be here now and all the choices I made. I'm happy to still be racing. I'm happy that I did the team. I'm happy to have my parents still around be-

cause I need them so much. So everything that I have now, I'm grateful for.

**You mentioned doing one more year. On one hand you've been racing a long time but then on the other it doesn't seem like you're nearing a stage to stop it all...**

At the moment it's definitely like this. I don't want to stop because what I love the most is racing, riding. So why should I stop now? Of course it's always good for a rider to stop as a champion. This is something that's great; I have this championship. I worked so hard for it and now I have it. Whether I get more or not, I don't care. I just like racing, so I will race one more year. One thing is for sure: I like winning. The moment that I will know that I won't be able to that then it's over. I can't sacrifice all that I do and put in all the work if I know that I cannot win. At this moment we are four girls fighting for the title and I'm still able to win. I will see next year how it goes. You never know what will happen. Maybe the others will keep improving because they are young. Maybe next year I will be five seconds too slow; I don't know. That's why now I take each season as it comes.

**What would be next? If you look at an athlete like Laia Sanz she's into Dakar rally, she's done Enduro, car racing. When the last chequered flag drops for you do you find another challenge?**

I'm not going to do Dakar, that's for sure! I love to watch it on TV but it's definitely not for me. Neither for Enduro, I like it. It's pretty big in France but I'm not thinking about it. I'm pretty sure that I'm going to do Le Touquet again because I really love this race. I love the 450. It's a pretty cool race. Outside of riding, I want to stay in the paddock. I want to keep working for the team. I really enjoyed working with Axel this year on the 85s and seeing his improvement. I will definitely keep [doing] the team as much as I can. I'm already talking about it because I care about what I will do after and I want to stay with my sponsors. Let's say that I have a lot of open doors and I don't want to close anything for the moment. It's not the time for me to decide something.



**Your comments about not being worried about numbers of titles and wins: do you think about the 'journey' rather than the 'destination' with your career? Can you get some perspective of what you have sacrificed?**

I missed a lot of things: birthdays, family parties, whatever but it's not about this. I talked about it with Yves Demaria because he was there when I got the second title. Yves was one of the first people to which I said "You know what? It looks like everyone is happy except me..." he was like, "it's normal, it goes like this for the first one and then it gets less and less. You will feel better, but it's normal." He was trying to help me because I didn't really understand what was going on. I think it's just about this: when you get something you really want, when you have it, afterwards you might a second one but it will be always 'less' than the first one. So it's not about all the sacrifice.

**So why do it?**

Because I like to race. I like to win. But it's not to count titles...it's just to win.

**You don't win just to look at a trophy...**

No, I don't care about the medal. And I know that if I didn't race in 2017 then I will see the new world champion and I will get pissed because I will think 'that could have been me...'

**So there's still fire there? A lot of professional athletes like to prove something to themselves...**

I don't think I need to prove anything to myself. This year, for the first time, I asked myself if I wanted to do one more season. It was the first time that I had to really think about it. But like I said when I think about a new world champion being crowned, I will get pissed. That's for sure. So I will go for one more year, until the moment that I will be sure that I don't care anymore.

**Can you talk about the mental side of racing, being a professional athlete and making the choice to be so dedicated? You also had to make a choice to live with the risks of this sport. Were there any doubts?**

If you start to think this way then it's over, but not only in motocross - it's over for everything. Motocross is dangerous but it's not the only thing that is dangerous. Life is dangerous generally. Unfortunately I have a really bad example in France a few years ago. There was a kid who was 18, 19 or something and he was racing every weekend. He broke his wrist so he stopped for two months and he started to party with his friends and he had a car accident and he died. If he didn't get hurt, he would have kept on racing and maybe the tragedy wouldn't have happened. If you start to think about things like this quite deeply then you won't do anything anymore. We know that this sport is dangerous and I know a lot of riders that now unfortunately are in wheelchairs or even actually passed away. Motocross is the thing I love the most in life. If something happens then I accept it.

**If you've got to explain your job and the sport to somebody who doesn't know about it then it must be seen as pretty unusual...you must have had some interesting conversations with people you've met for the first time...**

It's pretty hard! Most of the time I try to not say what I do. I normally say: "I do sport, I'm a professional athlete." If they don't ask more then I try not to give any more. I don't really like to show off. With people that don't know about the motocross then most of the time the conversation is not going to go the way I want! I have so many examples. One day a girl was asking me: "So you do motocross? But then you aren't you playing with your life all the time and battling with death?" I was like, "What? No! I'm not battling with anything! I'm just doing a sport. It's sport. I'm a professional athlete. That's it." Everyone was looking at me strangely. So I found it just helps to play it down a bit.



WMX WORLD CHAMP: LIVIA LANCELOT





# IN FOR THE LONG HAUL...?

By Adam Wheeler

**M**XGP reached a new milestone last week with the release of the 2017 calendar and a twenty fixture agenda that easily positions the series as the longest in the FIM cannon. Twenty Grands Prix is allegedly the maximum that promoters Youthstream can organise in their contract with the FIM and there was reportedly some dismay among manufacturers that an agreed total of eighteen rounds had been overlooked. Apparently reservation of the dates is a key factor of the calendar publication and there could be one or maybe two appointments that won't come to pass but with the day and month already slated then Youthstream have a gap and room to move if last minute contingencies dictate.

On one hand I was impressed that MXGP can now reach the scope of twenty races and obviously has enough promoters/circuit/clubs/federations and local governments keen to stage Grand Prix and source the funding from either promotional swag allocated for a territory or region's tourism affairs, a prominent sponsor(s) or the increasingly diminishing prospect of a bumper crowd packing the fences. Another small positive is the expansion of possibilities for the support European series and that hopefully each Grand Prix will not feel like such busy, over-crowded and rushed affairs that they have become in the past two-three seasons.

As a part of the travelling circus I could only imagine the reaction of team personnel to the two extra meetings and the prospect of another nerve-shredding run to Russia (Jeffrey Herlings

still bears the facial scars from his car accident in 2012...even if Semigorje witnessed an astonishing capacity crowd and proved that there is a potentially huge untapped market for the sport further east). Throw in January tests and pre-season Internationals as part of the set-up programme, national championship commitments for some squads that rely on the essential support from domestic companies and sponsors, a chance appearance at the Nations and maybe another SMX plus perhaps some winter supercross for some riders and suddenly AMA competitors don't receive quite as much sympathy for their Supercross-Motocross toil. A packed run-down from the end of February to tail of September leaves little room for competitions like the eight round British Championship (burgeoning Grand Prix was one reason for the Italian series to switch to a hurried three-four date scale prior to the start of the FIM term five years ago).

Assuming that young talent on a motocross bike will emerge from national junior and youth series' and make the leap into European Championships and then hanker for a shot at Grand Prix is one school of thought or career ladder but to reduce the status and possibilities for national contests to carry significance and appeal is a risk with the grass roots future of the sport. Like the possibility of Supercross also growing and flexing elbows to affect the American motocross landscape, Grand Prix could also be forcing further shifts on this continent and for powers and participants in German, Holland, France, Spain and the UK to name a few.





MXGP is ripening, and sponsors both inside the industry and external (Italian car giants Fiat a noticeable inclusion in 2016) continue to be attracted by the mix of exhilaration, diversity (sand? hard-pack? mudder? ruts? jumps?) accessibility and relatively low costs compared to other international motorcycle racing series. For several years the premier class has narrowed to the domain of the factories and as long as the big six are swept along by the promise of new markets (Indonesia and Russia, back again) and exposure then budgets will be scraped to rack-up the kilometres.

***“MXGP is ripening, and sponsors continue to be attracted by the mix of exhilaration, diversity and accessibility...”***

Stretching the sport involves a quantity of risk. Can France cope with two MXGPs? One in the north at Ernee and the southeast at Villars means a suitable distance between both. Can Italy really host three? With Arco, Maggiora and San Marino all situated along the northern stretch of the country. Indonesia is the wild card and while there is undoubtedly an audience in that region of Asia waiting for Grand Prix to visit will the new build at Pangkal Pinang draw the same kind of derision that seemed to greet the new build of Suphan Buri last incarnation of the Thai Grand Prix in March?

It is a risk of quality versus quantity and this is transition MXGP is currently wading through as it seizes the shooting buds of speculation from backers and possible growth around it. Whether Grand Prix stretches to 19 or 20 slots there will eventually be a moment for evaluation and whether the constitution of the sport can match the ambition for it. The very essence of motocross also starts to morph: can a rider really attack, take risks and push limits when the roll of dates and races means injury prevention would be a wiser tactic? The styles of Romain Febvre and Tim Gajser in the 17 and 18 round championships in the last two years indicates that this would not be the case but the elongation of the schedule means that very narrow balancing act between fire and fitness shrinks even more for the main players.









MAKING FOX'S INSTINCT BOOT

# INSTINCT- IVE

THINK FOX IS THE DEFINITIVE COOL AND PERFORMANCE-LED APPAREL BRAND? THEN DEFINITELY DON'T DISCOUNT THEIR RIDING BOOTS, NOW FOUR YEARS ON THE MARKET AND ALMOST AN EMBLEM OF WHAT THE AMERICAN FIRM HAS COME TO STAND FOR. WE SPOKE TO CO-CREATOR ANDRE LEE ON HOW FOX ENRICHED THEIR SOLE...

By Adam Wheeler  
Photos by Ray Archer



**OK** we've tried Fox' new Instinct boot – the Legion Enduro model – and as well as being perhaps the trickiest and coolest piece of riding footwear we've worn they were also damn comfortable. Luckily we were able to chat in detail about perhaps one of Fox's most understated products next to the reams of fancy FlexAir riding kit and V3 helmets on a visit to the company's modern HQ in Irvine, California. Smiling Product Development master Andre Lee comes through the atrium of the facility holding an Instinct and ready to chat about the flagship of his fourteen years of work at Fox and a boot that boasts a patent-pending hinge lock-out system, a Duratac sole and burn guard, a low ride chasses, slim toe profile, zero break-in and the compulsory killer styling.

Created and grafted in Irvine but constructed by specialist vendors in China the Instinct first popped up in Fox catalogues back in 2012 and was seen on the bottom of limbs in the AMA and MXGP before then. The firm's array of riding talent is a useful pool of testing and feedback.

Unlike lines of riding gear that might be spruced up once or maybe twice (or more) a season the composition, engineering and progression that goes into the amalgamation of components for riding boots is a more convoluted blend. We were surprised to learn that the Instinct not only represents one of Fox's top priced and placed products but its influence also seeps into other departments and articles in the riding range.

"I don't think many people looked at Fox as a real premium boot brand until we launched the Instinct," says Global Category Director Mark

Finley, who had earlier guided us around the design and production stations, a section of which was understandably off-limits as gear manufacturers are often busying-away on ideas and concepts that might not make it to market for another two years. "We put a huge effort into the Instinct. The results from a sales and brand perception standpoint have really proven that we have started the change in people's minds. Of course, we still have a long way to go. The leaders have really done an amazing job with their lines. It drives us to know that we can be better. I feel we have the team assembled to continue to grow this part of our business. It is an imperative with the team at Fox."

With powerful peers like Alpinestars, Sidi, Gaerne and even Scott turning heads with their 5.0 'tulip' opening system then the 'battle among the buckles' can be intense for what is perhaps a rider's biggest financial outlay before he stabs a button on the bars or dabs down on a kickstarter.

Andre Lee is part of what Finley says is the right crew to lodge Fox among the boot players. "We have roughly four team members devoted to the boot program," he continues. "Boot development is very tricky. The boot is one of the main contact points for the rider. There is so much input coming from a pro level rider through the boot. Ensuring each rider has the right feel for the bike is critical. The wear points vary depending on the bike type (frame layout), rider type (squeezing the bike vs riding a little looser). This is where you must take time in the development process. It may require updates and complete new tooling once you see how the boot is wearing and working for the rider."











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This is where Lee comes in. Andre's work involves a methodical and mechanical part of the boot that probably does not enter the conscious mind of the rider or customer until the product has survived a skirmish, protected an ankle-twist or come through some of the most testing conditions on the track or trail. "I look at technical development with the structure and the material and the compound and analyse the purpose for each material so on the Instinct we know exactly what we need to put on the inner sole or the boot upper," Lee says, looking at the two Instincts he has placed on the table before us. "We want the right material in the right place."

### **Can you talk a little about the materials used on the Instinct?**

From the bottom to top: for the outer sole I used to work with technical rubber and compounds so I am familiar with the Goodyear people with Vibram. For the Duratec we really upgraded from the Goodyear max and improved it again like the abrasion resistance and puncture strength. For the upper part comfort was priority: you had to be able to open the box and go ride. So there is similarity there with tennis shoes but still with the strength that is needed thanks to the high-abrasion upper, microfiber and synthetic leather. The TPU part is from BSF in Germany; literally what we use here is the very best material from the footwear industry.

### **And there must be continual evolution in terms of performance...**

We keep monitoring feedback from the customers when it comes to the rubber and any early signs of wear. We want to know any causes. Is it from the physical property itself or from something like the footpeg? What manufacturer and material, like titanium, is being used of the footpeg to cause this effect? We use composite rubber for the burn guard, not only to keep shape but to push up the tear strength and heat resistance. Any new materi-

als have to be reviewed and analysed through feedback. Up until now we have kept on revising and improving. From the outside you might not notice but inside there have been some changes.

### **Is the construction quite complicated?**

Yeah. I call it an 'onion layer' construction and if the factory does not know about the gluing system requires then they won't be able to make the Instinct. We are combining elements of technical athletic shoes with utility boots – all mixed together. We try to eliminate any stitching on the upper. With the current bonding technology we can improve the join two or three times better compared to normal regular athletic shoes. We are already working on the next generation of Instinct and pursuing what more can be done from static construction to the materials used.



### **What about the testing phase?**

We start from prototype samples and also listen to our Pro riders like Dungey, Roczen and then also testers internally and externally to find the strengths and weaknesses and then keep modifying until we get to the confirmation stage.



**Four years on how do you feel about the Instinct?**

This version we call 2.0. We started in 2012 with the 1.0 and then we had some re-engineering with a 1.5. The 2.0 is currently the best upgrade we have done. It means lighter, stronger and better and replacing any material that deteriorated prematurely or places where we could even increase strength.

**Can you take ideas or standards from other products on the market? Fox seem to set the pace and look when it comes to riding gear...**

Yeah, of course. We look at other brands for their construction and materials and perhaps any other part they might use. We look at the strength and weaknesses of the product or maybe any 'over design' that we could then look to simply and apply to our boot or where we could 'attack' with our next one! We released the first Instinct in 2012 but we started work in 2008. So we definitely keep looking at our competitors to see how we can exceed their own products!

**What about the design itself? Does that come down to the same dept here in Irvine?**

At Fox design is almost like the soul of the company. We are very focussed on this and we have quite a few staff from the Pasadena Arts centre with a lot of technical and industrial knowledge. The designer is very active in the colour and look and from my side I bring the knowledge of the material for certain purposes. The beauty of products here is that design and product development is done side-by-side right from the beginning, even from the Brief stages and that's what has kept me here for almost fourteen years.

**Maybe for many people when you say 'Fox' they think of a lifestyle brand with cool riding gear. How does something like boots fit into that picture? It must be difficult to keep**

**that quality and perception across such a big product range...how serious are Fox about riding boots?**

Very serious. The boots are almost the no.1 priority-

**Really?**

Yeah, and even something like the V3 helmet has taken a lot from the boots as we've learned about materials and construction. The boot is like the leader when it comes to this kind of development and knowledge. We are exposed to anything that's new in the market and we constantly ask: what is new? What can we use? On the next Instinct you will see. We brainstorm a lot and then make this recipe to try and reach the best. A top tier product like Instinct is really important to Fox and that's why we design very carefully and test heavily before it goes to the market.

"The Instinct is a priority," Finley states. "We specifically work to capture the boot with our top riders during our seasonal [photo] shoots. Because we haven't been known as a premium boot brand in the past it is critical for Fox to tell the Instinct story. You will see additional focus on video around the Instinct as well. Again, trying to ensure the consumer understands the technical features of the Instinct."

From our time at Irvine the belief that Fox could mould and then marshal a programme of evolution around a premium object like a riding boot is utterly believable. Fans of the brand may save their pennies for the riding gear or lifestyle clothing but getting a glimpse into how these are also fashioned in the same offices then its easy to see how this company could forge footwear that ticks the style box. We cannot offer feedback yet on whether the Instinct is a rock-hard composite animal that lasts moto after moto, trail after trail but the initial requirements any rider would want from a wallet-scouring purchase are right in place.



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## ANSWER

The first of the special dedicated liveries for the official end to the motocross/Supercross racing season was unveiled by Answer just prior to last Saturday's Monster Energy Cup and with their Camo effort based around their Elite gear line. This is limited edition stuff so won't be around for long and the Elite riding wear hits the mid-level pricing point for the brand with the key elements of the garments being: leather inner knee patches, performance and moisture-wicking fabrics and a waistband buckle and lock...all of which compliment the usual attention to the fit and form of the jersey and pants. An Evolve 3 helmet and AR-1 race boots help complete the look.

The Camo catches the eye but the Blue/Red and Teal/Orange are also pretty special in the Elite section. Have a look here:

[www.answer racing.com//default/race-wear/elite.html](http://www.answer racing.com//default/race-wear/elite.html)







TEST

By Roland Brown  
Photos by Arnold Debus and Peter Musch

# SCRAMBLING

BMW'S R nineT FAMILY GETS A FASHIONABLE BOOST WITH THE SCRAMBLER AS THE GERMAN FIRM LEAP ONTO THE WIDENING BANDWAGON. DOES THE NEW OFFERING DELIVER THE FUN FACTOR OR SIMPLY RAMP UP THE 'ME TOO' FACTOR OF THE SEGMENT? ROLAND HAD A RIDE TO FIND OUT





R nineT SCRAMBLER









## R nineT SCRAMBLER



**W**hen BMW revamped its huge-selling R1200GS adventure bike with a liquid-cooled engine in 2013, the German marque's traditional air-cooled boxer engine's days appeared to be numbered. But that thinking didn't take into account the success of the following year's R nineT, the retro-themed roadster that surprised even BMW by selling more than 23,000 units despite its high price tag and uncompromisingly sporty character.

The arrival of a follow-up with an off-road slant and the name Scrambler is no surprise. The scrambler look is popular in the custom world, more for the rugged image – think high-level exhausts and chunky tyres – than genuine desire to ride on dirt. Manufacturers have joined in, notably with the popular Scramblers from Triumph and Ducati. A model designed along similar lines made perfect sense for BMW, especially if it could be made less expensive.

The R nineT Scrambler is the result. Its 1170cc, dohc boxer motor is taken straight from the nineT (which is renamed the R nineT Roadster). The maximum power output of 110bhp and peak torque figure of 119N.m are unchanged, despite a new twin-silencer Akrapovic exhaust system.

Most of the differences are in the chassis, which is based on a reworked tubular steel frame that kicks out the front forks at a relatively lazy 29 degrees, against the Roadster's 25.5 degrees. Those forks are 43mm right-way-up units, rather than 46mm upside-downers, and have gaiters for a traditional look, plus more travel at each end. Off-road suitability is also enhanced to some degree by the front wheel, which is 19- rather than 17 inches in diameter.

On the other hand the Scrambler loses off-road ability because to reduce cost it comes with cast rather than wire-spoked wheels. Further saving comes from the front brake, which uses Brembo's ordinary four-piston, non-radial calipers. The fuel tank is made from steel rather than aluminium; there's no remote preload adjuster for the rear shock; and the Scrambler also makes do with just a speedometer rather than twin clocks.

Handlebars are positioned higher than the Roadster's so give a slightly more upright and roomy riding position. The radial eight-valve boxer lump is 15bhp down on the liquid-cooled unit, but it still has more than enough punch for lively performance, especially on wet roads like those experienced for much of the launch in Austria. The BMW impressed, effortlessly sitting at 80mph or more when visibility allowed, and surging forward on request towards a top speed of about 130mph.





**"IT SAYS PLENTY FOR THIS  
RELATIVELY SIMPLE NAKED BIKE  
THAT IT SHOULD PROVE SO MUCH  
FUN DESPITE THE CONDITIONS..."**





R nineT SCRAMBLER





## TEST

On occasionally slippery roads I was glad of the accessory traction control system, although it is BMW's basic ASC (which just monitors front and rear wheel speeds) rather than a cutting-edge system incorporating a lean-angle sensor. I was impressed by the brakes, even when the roads dried, though riders who operate the front lever with only two fingers might miss the extra bite of the Roadster's radial calipers.

The Scrambler's handling is less sharp than the Roadster's, but still allowed the bike to be cranked through hairpins with little effort and an admirably neutral feel. The forks were sufficiently firm and well damped to allow precise steering, while also delivering good ride quality. The same was true of the shock, which occasionally felt a bit harsh over bigger bumps, but maintained pretty good damping control and contributed to the Scrambler's long-distance ability.

The thinly padded seat was more comfortable than it looked, although some riders were shifting around after a couple of hours. The BMW was reasonably practical in other ways, despite its near total lack of weather protection – though I would not be so complimentary if the launch bikes hadn't been fitted with invaluable accessory heated grips. The 17-litre tank is good for a respectable 150 miles; shame there's no fuel gauge (let alone consumption information), as well as no tacho.

It says plenty for this relatively simple naked bike that it should prove so much fun despite the conditions. BMW's addition to motorcycling's ranks of Scrambler models has an appealing blend of retro looks, character and all-round performance. In a way, this dual-purpose boxer is a throwback version of the R1200GS, with less power, weather protection, range, electronic assistance and suspension travel than the modern adventure model.

On the other hand the Scrambler gains by being simpler, lower and lighter than the current GS. It's less expensive, too (costing £10,530 in the UK, against the Roadster's £11,900 and GS's £12,185), although plenty of buyers will doubtless pay more to personalise it with extras that range from a screen and headlamp grille to hard or soft luggage.

The Scrambler certainly adds a new dimension to the R nineT family, which will grow further in 2017, with the base-model R nineT Pure and half-faired R nineT Racer recently revealed at the Intermot show in Cologne. Three years since that liquid-cooled R1200GS seemed set to consign BMW's air-cooled boxers to history, they're back with a retro theme and punching as hard as ever.





**R nineT SCRAMBLER**











## INDIAN

As you'd expect from their classy line of cruisers, Indian have a distinctly special line of clothing and apparel that sit snugly next to both the brand's high-quality technology and also its bold iconography. In an association launched with fellow American firm Red Wing Shoes the handcrafted Spirit Lake Boots (in brown), Worthington Boot (both for men) and the Connelly Boot (for women) feature leather construction and the application of other materials for durability like Vibram and Goodyear welt fixings. Prices and other specs can be found by contacting local dealers but browsing the rest of the Indian clothing and accessory range on the website is also beneficial (as well as tempting).

[www.shop-indianmotorcycle.com/uk/apparel.html](http://www.shop-indianmotorcycle.com/uk/apparel.html)





## ALPINESTARS

Eli Tomac certainly gave Alpinestars' limited edition 'Vegas Collection' of their Racer Braap scheme a good airing under the lights of the Sam Boyd last Saturday. The winner of Americas and USA MXGP rounds may have missed a '0' away from the cheque of the overall win of the Monster Energy Cup but had the high-vis and unique apparel to make an impression while doing so.

Astars reworked the colours for the season-ending spectacle in Las Vegas emboldening the green and increasing the brightness for the latest instalment of their 'LE' lines and special celebrations that seem to be growing in regularity (even if we are still waiting for an MXGP special to balance out the market focus).

Naturally there are only small quantities of Tomac's gear to go so hustle to a dealer rapidly for something special.

[www.alpinestars.com](http://www.alpinestars.com)











## BACKPAGE

Monster Energy Girls  
By CormacGP











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**'On-track Off-road'** is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focused on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP. 'On-track Off-road' will be published online at [www.ontrackoffroad.com](http://www.ontrackoffroad.com) every other Tuesday. To receive an email notification that a new issue available with a brief description of each edition's contents simply enter an address in the box provided on the homepage. All email addresses will be kept strictly confidential and only used for purposes connected with OTOR.

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